

The Development of American Agriculture: a Historical Analysis

ISSN 0003-4827

No known copyright restrictions.

Recommended Citation

"The Development of American Agriculture: a Historical Analysis." *The Annals of Iowa* 45 (1981), 656-657.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.8783>

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](#)

THE ANNALS OF IOWA

The author of three previous books on agriculture, Drache is well qualified to write the present book. Although he leaves little doubt as to his personal biases, he presents solid documentation for his position. Besides the personal interviews with the farmers, Drache's sources include books, journal articles, and government publications. *Tomorrow's Harvest* is a valuable addition to the literature on contemporary agriculture and should be of interest to the specialist and non-specialist alike. Most important, it is also readable.

John N. Riismandel
Ocean County College
Toms River, NJ

The Development of American Agriculture: A Historical Analysis, by Willard W. Cochrane. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979. pp. xii, 467. Figures, tables, maps, suggestions for further reading, notes, index. \$25.00 cloth, \$14.95 paper.

The intent of this book is to "introduce the modern student of economic development to the historical development of American agriculture, and to explain how this development occurred . . . (p. 6)." The author, an agricultural economist at the University of Minnesota, has written or co-authored seven previous books on agricultural policy.

A chronological history of American agriculture, painted in broad strokes, is the initial section. Less well known, to the general reader and a major contribution of this book, is the author's explanation of "The Forces of Development and Structural Change," and his organization of "A Conceptual Model" to describe farming activities from 1950 to 1977.

Cochrane's thesis that American agriculture crossed two major watersheds during the years 1763 through 1785 and 1900 through 1920 is probably the most unique part of the book. Potentially, the 1970s produce yet a third watershed but the author realizes that perspective is still lacking on recent years. The first period, before and during the Revolutionary War, is based on what might have happened with British land policy for the region west of the Appalachians, a plan that was aborted when independence was achieved. Instead of restrictive land and settlement patterns the availability of western land altered economic development in the older states as well as in the newer states of the West. A better statistical case is made for the 1900 to 1920 watershed. On-farm employment to 1910 grew but afterwards agricul-

Book Reviews

ture had fewer employment opportunities. Farm output per worker and output per unit of input changed in this era which brought in new science-based agriculture. Tentatively, Cochrane feels that agriculture is in the midst of another major watershed crossing. Farm technological advances are slowing down, key inputs are becoming more scarce and costly, and real prices for farm products are rising to new levels.

The conceptual models shown here are keyed to the student of economics but can be understood by the general reader. For instance, Cochrane shows that production controls using acreage limitations, employed through government intervention since the 1930s, have been "a slippery, inefficient way of reducing production" (p. 379). The farmer merely increased capital inputs to produce more on less land. Similarly, he shows how the "'early-bird' farmer, who adopts a new and improved technology" (p. 387) reduces his costs of production and gains profits that enable him to expand his land holdings. Late adopters of these same new technologies receive far less benefits and the laggards are forced out of agriculture altogether. Cochrane's thought-provoking analysis of American agriculture is thoroughly documented and worth reading for any student of American agriculture.

Homer E. Socolofsky
Kansas State University
Manhattan, KS

Pure Nostalgia: Memories of Early Iowa, edited by Carl Hamilton.
Ames, Iowa: The Iowa State University Press, 1979. pp. viii, 212.
Photographs. \$8.95.

Carl Hamilton has brought together eight accounts of life in Iowa, roughly from 1850 to 1940. They are for the most part excerpts from privately printed books and articles. The first-person recollections that these Iowans have recorded reflect the hardships as well as the joyous moments each experienced. Anyone who reads the book will soon learn that the "good old days" were not always so good and certainly not something to which many of us would want to return. The stories do have, however, great appeal. The book cannot be easily laid aside until one completes the story being read. And one is likely to want to hurry on to the next. The older reader will relive events similar to those he may have personally experienced while the

Copyright of *Annals of Iowa* is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.